

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing today on behalf of the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative:  
Promoting Responsible Fatherhood, of Connecticut.

Since its founding under former DSS Commissioner Pat Wilson Coker, this program has connected hundreds of fathers with their children and their families, and eliminating it from the state's budget would be a profound mistake.

We all know that the lack of a father has a damaging impact on a young person's life. What you may not know is that the state of Connecticut has developed and standardized an effective network of safe havens for fathers.

Many of our clients are just out of prison and did not know their own fathers, or did not have a positive influence in their dads. They may owe back child support and not have a connection with their children's mothers. In Bridgeport our program is *Fathers for Life*, and with a very small investment of state dollars we connect dads to the court system, their children's mothers – and most importantly to their children.

We are contracted to serve 50 fathers a year and in fact we serve many more. Our dads are better able to become employed, pay their child support, and spend more time with their children. Our dads are attending school meetings with their kids, they are making payments on child support, they are learning from **their peers** what mom might have been thinking while they were in jail or otherwise out of the picture – they are being there for their kids.

How do we do this? Each of us uses a validated, proven curriculum – dads can come to a group every week to learn from other dads and see people who have succeeded. We have outstanding staff attending family magistrate court every week to tell the court how our clients are doing and to be a resource for the court – the courts can refer people to us, where they can learn what they don't know about being a dad.

Case Management – we connect dads to resources they need but didn't know about. Support – the door is always open for our dads to come back.

One of our fathers stood up at Governor Malloy's very first Town Hall in Bridgeport and implored him to restore funding for this program.

For a small investment, the state of Connecticut is able to reach hundreds of fathers and make a huge difference in their kids' lives. This is not easy work but the state has invested many years and lots of money in figuring out how to do it well. We are doing this work every day in cities throughout the state and I can't urge you strongly enough to keep this network funded.

This program is stopping a predictable spiral. So many of our dads did not know their own dads. They are often already struggling with incarceration, with a poor education, with a tough job market, we are asking these dads to do something they have never seen! Let me tell you, our dads are so grateful for the information and knowledge about how to mend things with their kids and their kids' moms. It's not easy and they need support. Our programs have proved they can provide this knowledge and support for dads and their children to succeed.

Sincerely,

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